

## MEGALITHS

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*'Megalithic' tombs and related monuments constructed usually of large slabs or blocks of stone, either in their natural form or roughly quarried and trimmed, are more abundant in the Deccan and South India than any other category of ancient structures. That fact in itself gives them a special claim to the attention of Indian archaeology. But they have a potential importance also in a wider context; for many of them show a similarity, seemingly amounting to kinship, with megaliths in other parts of the world—in the lands bordering upon the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, in the Caucasus, in Iran. The significance of this apparent interrelationship over many thousands of miles of the earth's surface cannot yet be appraised, but the problem is one which stirs the imagination. A preliminary need is more knowledge of the character and distribution of the megaliths of India, and a detailed study of them has accordingly been undertaken by the Archaeological Survey of India. To this study the following paper by the Director of the Institute of Archaeology in the University of London, dealing with important international problems of classification and distribution, constitutes an opportune introduction.*

THE term megalithic was originally introduced by antiquaries to describe a fairly easily definable class of monuments in western and northern Europe, consisting of huge, undressed stones and termed in Celtic dolmens, cromlechs and menhirs. It has subsequently been extended to cover a far more miscellaneous collection of erections and even excavations all over the Old World and into the New.

Now what criteria have in fact been used in applying the term in the original region? Not, I fear, that indicated by etymology—the magnitude (*megathos*) of the stones (*lithoi*) employed. For instance, New Kingdom temples and statues are often composed of larger stones than most admittedly megalithic structures in England or Denmark, but they are not normally classified under this heading. Nor are the defences of Boghaz-keui despite the size of some of the stones employed there. Is it the rudeness of the stones, the use of *pierres brutes*? The architecture of Tiryns could be thus described, but in fact the term Cyclopean has been deliberately preferred to megalithic. Conversely, quite a number of monuments still studied as megalithic are composed of, or at least comprise, well dressed and even sculptured stones—for instance the Giants' Tombs in Sardinia, and many Caucasian 'dolmens'.

In practice the term is applied only to monuments the use of which is known imperfectly or not at all, but which we presume were erected for some superstitious, ritual or religious end. Thereby we admit that the basis of classification is not merely material or magnitude, but also function. Now after all function is the proper basis for classification in a science that aims at classifying human societies. But this particular sort of function can never be completely known in the case of extinct and preliterate societies, and such were the societies by which all or nearly all the monuments originally classed as megalithic were erected.

In default of exact knowledge of function, archaeologists have had to appeal to complexes of traits regularly associated with the monuments concerned. In the case of the monuments once termed dolmens, fairly definite and coherent traits have been detected and classified: all were sepulchral and contained some sort of burial furniture. The traits



associated with cromlechs or stone-circles are much less coherent. Satisfactory associations for menhirs or standing stones are scarcely obtainable. But as soon as we admit associated traits to the basis of classification, the original criteria of size and substance begin to lose their significance, and quite different principles emerge. Let me illustrate the consequent changes of method by reference to one group in the original triad—the dolmens that were all at least tombs.

On the coasts of the Atlantic, the North Sea and the Baltic megalithic tombs exhibit a continuous distribution in space. But they do not disclose a single culture in the usual sense of a complex of traits—similar pottery, tools, weapons and ornaments regularly recurring together in these tombs and not in other sepulchral associations. Only one class of pottery, the so-called Beakers, is at all often found in these tombs all over the province. But there is very definite evidence from Denmark, Brittany and Britain, that Beaker pottery and its associates were not used by the original builders of the tombs concerned. Moreover in Central Europe and even Britain the Beaker-complex is normally found in separate graves that are in no possible sense megalithic. There are still some rather general agreements in the ceramic furniture of megalithic tombs in Western Europe: what Mrs. Hawkes<sup>1</sup> calls 'channelled ware' is found in several tombs in South France, Brittany and round the North Channel and the Clyde. Examples from Spain and Portugal come from natural caves. And some tombs from Portugal to Orkney contain simple leathery pots of a general Western aspect. But neither in the Paris basin nor in Northern Europe do significant analogies to either class occur. On the other hand Western pots are by no means confined to the megalithic province, but are common also on the Swiss Lakes and in Upper Italy. Again, considering weapons, the leaf-shaped type of arrow-head that alone is found in British megalithic tombs is never found in Swedish or Danish tombs at all, and represents only 9% of those from Portuguese and 17% from Almerian ones.

In the Spanish Peninsula hollow-based or tanged-and-barbed points are commoner than leaf-shaped, and we encounter also transverse or chisel-ended arrow-heads, *petits tranchets*, as the French call them. Such never occur in British megalithic tombs, but they are found in such tombs in central France, Denmark, northern Europe and occasionally in Brittany. Such arrowheads are, however, by no means confined to megalithic cultures or periods but were widely distributed in pre-neolithic times before any megalithic tombs were being built in Europe, and were probably adopted by the megalith-builders in each area from earlier hunter-fishers of the Tardenoisian, Ertebølle or other mesolithic culture. Finally there was no 'megalithic' race as far as anthropometric studies of the skeletons from European 'dolmens' can tell; though dolichocranial skulls predominate in European megalithic tombs, these are, save in Great Britain, generally mixed with round-heads.<sup>2</sup>

An attempt to subdivide megalithic tombs on the basis of plans supplemented by accessory features like the form of the covering tumulus does not help us; by associating such architectural subdivisions with assemblages of relics, we are not left with a couple of comprehensive but widely distributed cultures. The favourite device has been to distinguish simple dolmens or *dysser*, passage graves (*dolmens à galerie*) and long cists (*allées couvertes*). Under the naïve evolutionary conceptions of the mid-nineteenth century, it was easily assumed that the simple dolmens were the earliest megalithic sepulchres. And in Denmark some simple dolmens—of a rather specialized form—really proved to be earlier

<sup>1</sup> 'Channelled ware in Western Europe', *Archaeological Journal*, XCV (1938), 132-164.

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Coon, *The Races of Europe* (New York, 1939), summarizes most of the material. This is very scanty save for central France, Denmark (on which see also Brøndsted, *Danmarks Oldtid*, i (Copenhagen, 1938), p. 313) and Britain.



than any of the more elaborate megalithic tombs when judged by their furniture. This old evolutionary idea has lasted a long time, but more critical and exact examination of the monuments in several regions has now revealed that the allegedly simple dolmens are just the most stubborn remnants of more complex structures. For example in 1939 Radford and I<sup>1</sup> examined a simple dolmen near Birori in Sardinia that had been taken by Duncan Mackenzie as representative of the start of an evolutionary series leading up to the classical Giant's Grave. We detected both additional stones that had gone to make up the original elongated chamber and part of the façade of a normal Giant's Grave that had been despoiled. More than twenty years ago Crawford<sup>2</sup> had pointed out that the dolmens of Wessex and the Cotswolds are just the chambers of long barrows of the complex Cotswold-Severn type that had lost their barrows. Now Daniel<sup>3</sup> has established the same origin in ruination for the rest of the English dolmens, and Estyn Evans<sup>4</sup> for those of Ulster. In other cases, notably on both sides of the Pyrenees, it has been shown that tombs of the simplest type contain exclusively relics of later date than those derivable from the more elaborate tombs in the same region.<sup>5</sup> So these alleged dolmens have been transferred to the class of 'cists', to which we shall shortly return.

Similarly the distinction between passage-grave and long cist is hard to apply in many instances. Are the magnificent tombs like Cueva Menga and Cueva da Viera near Antequera,<sup>6</sup> or the Orkney stalled-cairns,<sup>7</sup> passage-graves or long cists? The assumption that long cairns go with long cists and round cairns with passage-graves has led Daniel<sup>8</sup> into some curious special pleading to explain away the very long cairns that cover passage-graves in the far north of Scotland and to transform tombs like Uley and Stoney Littleton in the Severn group into long cists. The fact is that only one highly specialized form of megalithic tomb, the Paris cist, is associated with a distinctive culture over more than a limited local province<sup>9</sup>; tombs of the Paris type do contain significantly similar assemblages of relics, not only in the Paris basin, but also as far west as Jersey and as far east as Sweden. But the same assemblage recurs as near as the Marne in tombs, of rather the same plan indeed, but cut in the chalk.

In reality once we admit plans and relics as a basis of classification, the original idea of an overground structure built with very big stones, begins to fade out of the picture. For instance on the granitic plateau of Estramadura in Portugal we have a classical series of tombs consisting of a polygonal chamber and narrow entrance-passage composed of huge

<sup>1</sup> *Antiquity*, XIII, 376.

<sup>2</sup> *The Long Barrows of the Cotswolds*, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> *Antiquity*, XI, 183.

<sup>4</sup> *A Preliminary Survey of the Ancient Monuments of Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1940), p. xv.

<sup>5</sup> Pericot, *La Civilización megalítica catalana* (Barcelona, 1925). But in Almeria (south-eastern Spain) there are cists, round or rectangular covered by round cairns that are regarded by Siret and Leisner ('Die Megalithgräber der iberischen Halbinsel', *Römischgermanische Forschungen*, 17, 1943) as older than the local passage-graves. Though used as collective tombs, these have no passage of entrance and are not usually termed megalithic—though perhaps they deserve the term.

<sup>6</sup> *Antiquaries Journal*, XIV, 404; more recent plans, S. Gimenez Reina, 'Memoria arqueológica de la Provincia Malaga' (Comisario gen. de Excavaciones, *Informes y Memorias*, no. 12, Madrid, 1946), 31-43.

<sup>7</sup> In *Scotland before the Scots* (London, 1946), p. 98, I show how flimsy are the arguments, architectural as well as associational, that I had previously advanced for contrasting passage-graves with long cists in Scotland.

<sup>8</sup> 'The Dual Nature of the Megalithic Colonization of Prehistoric Europe', *Proc. of the Prehistoric Society*, VII (1941), 1-49.

<sup>9</sup> Childe, *Dawn of European Civilization* (London, 1947), pp. 302-5.



upright slabs supporting equally bulky lintels or capstones. But on the clay lands round the Tagus estuary, tombs of precisely the same plan have been excavated in the subsoil and furnished with just the same set of relics.<sup>1</sup> Finally in Algarve and Almeria the same plan was reproduced in tombs, built again above ground, but of small stones laid horizontally to support a corbelled roof. Yet these tombs too contain the same sort of furniture as their rock-cut and genuinely megalithic counterparts. The same continuity of plan and furniture over disparate structural devices could be illustrated from prehistoric Sardinia or the north of Scotland and even more strikingly in early historical times by Etruscan funerary architecture. In southern Etruria, the chamber, though at first roofed with lintel-slabs, was cut in the soft *tufa*, as was the entrance passage; in the north where the subsoil is unsuited to such treatment, the chamber was built above-ground of blocks.<sup>2</sup> Yet in both areas the plans are the same and the tomb was covered by a tumulus. The structural technique seems to depend on geological factors while the same plan is faithfully preserved. It can plausibly be argued that the megalithic tomb is, in regions of shallow soil and refractory rocks, the easiest reproduction of the rock-cut sepulchre of the same form. In any case if plan be reckoned as significative of a megalithic complex, rock-cut tombs like those of the Marne or the Tagus estuary cannot be excluded.

But once we admit into our survey rock-cut and corbelled tombs, we can no longer confine our survey to western Europe, but must look further east. Already in south-eastern Sicily we meet rock-cut tombs which, in the planning of the chambers, the presence of curved façades and the form of the portal reproduce some of the most striking features of West European tombs, built of really big stones. But these are equally reminiscent of the rock-cut tombs of the Cyclades, Cyprus, Syria and Palestine, and share with them common elements in furniture and funerary ritual. Again at Hagios Kosmas in Attica<sup>3</sup> we have in the same cemetery both cists of slabs and corbelled tombs, both alike built in excavations provided with ritual entrances and used as collective ossuaries. Yet they were not termed megalithic and would be excluded if the size of the stones were the sole criterion. But with them must stand or fall contemporary rock-cut tombs in Euboea and Cyprus. And having got so far we could not logically exclude a number of rock-cut tombs in Asia Minor and even Iran that have I think never been considered in connection with the megalithic problem.

But there we do meet monuments that have been thus included, the so-called 'dolmens' of Palestine, Syria and the Caucasus. Now these are not comparable to the Danish dolmens, but rather to what in northern and western Europe are termed cists. Now not all cists are megalithic. Most cists in fact are little stone coffins, manifestly designed to contain only a single contracted skeleton. Such are the short cists typical of the Bronze Age in Highland Britain and Eire, the Chamblandes tombs of Switzerland and Upper Italy or, further east, the graves of the 'Minyans' in Middle Helladic Greece.<sup>4</sup> But the component stones, particularly the capstone of such cists at least in the British Isles, are often large and heavy. Stripped of the tumulus that normally covered them such look quite like small 'dolmens'; the *kistvaens* of Dartmoor offer a good example. Such cists have in fact been regarded as reduced versions of megalithic tombs, but in reality they are just as likely to be stone translations of wooden coffins or grave-linings. A plank coffin containing a doubled up Amerind skeleton in the Haye Museum in New York struck me as exactly like our

<sup>1</sup> Vergilio Correia, 'El Neolitico de Pavia' (Comision de Investigaciones paleont. y prehist., *Memoria* 27, Madrid, 1921).

<sup>2</sup> Åkerström, 'Studien über die etruskischen Gräber', *Skrifter Svensk Institut i Rom* (Lund, 1934).

<sup>3</sup> *American Journ. of Archaeology*, XXXVIII (1934), 268-70.

<sup>4</sup> Childe, *Dawn*, pp. 70, 238, 288.



Scottish short cists. And plank linings to separate graves<sup>1</sup> are known in Jutland, Finland, Central Russia and elsewhere.

Such short cists or stone coffins are always and properly excluded from the class of megalithic tombs. One reason is that they are always separate graves while the typical megalithic tombs seem to be normally collective sepulchres, or to have started as such. One architectural clue to the use of a tomb as a collective sepulchre would seem to be the presence of a portal or entry to the chamber. This is present even in Danish dolmens though the chambers seldom measure internally more than 2 by .75 m. and never contain more than six skeletons.<sup>2</sup> Admittedly this entrance was not always functional. In the Cyclades,<sup>3</sup> at Hagios Kosmas in Attica and Krazi in Crete, the corpses had been introduced through the roof into collective tombs provided with portals. On the other hand tombs thus provided might contain only a single burial; the Early Cycladic corbelled tombs of Syros normally held but one interment, while contemporary tombs of just the same plan in Attica were crammed with skeletons. Another guide to the distinction between a collective or megalithic cist and a non-megalithic cist or separate grave is afforded by the position in the tumulus; a megalithic tomb, unless provided with an entrance passage, must be situated near the margin of the tumulus, whereas a short cist normally lies at the centre of the barrow heaped to cover it.

Now on either criterion quite a number of alleged dolmens in Hither Asia and North Africa might be really just short cists, stripped of the barrows that once buried them. In a necropolis explored by Stekelis,<sup>4</sup> out of 168 cists all were closed, only two reached an internal length of 1.5 m. and all were evidently designed to receive a single interment. Yet the excavator suggests that here dolmen and cist differed only in size. The Numidian dolmens, described by Frobenius,<sup>5</sup> average 1.75 m. by 1.20 m. by 1.0 m. and all seem to have lain at the centres of tumuli, now marked by rings of stones, so that all were separate graves. For the same reason the *bassina* graves and their Libyan and Nubian analogues cannot strictly be brought into the class of megalithic tombs as hitherto defined.

Nevertheless there is one feature that can be used to bring some of the monuments of these regions within our class. Some have portals, and not only so, but portals carved in a single stone slab in the form called a port-hole stone in western and northern Europe. In the latter areas the entries to many megalithic and collective tombs are closed by a monolith in which a round or subrectangular aperture has been carved; sometimes the aperture is carved in the lower edge of the slab only, forming what Daniel<sup>6</sup> called a dog-kennel entry; at other times it is formed by semicircular slices cut out of the proximate edges of two juxtaposed slabs so that, juxtaposed, they compose a single oval hole. Two-thirds of the corbelled tombs at Los Millares in Almeria were entered through port-holes.<sup>7</sup> These occur more sporadically in contemporary orthostatic tombs in Granada and Andalusia, rarely in Portugal, than in the British Isles<sup>8</sup> (the Cotswolds, Cheshire, Man, Donegal, Sligo, Cavan and Leitrim). In the Spanish Peninsula port-holes are found alike

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Nordmann, 'The Megalithic Culture of Northern Europe' (SMYA., XXXIX, 3, Helsinki, 1935), 26; Aarbøger, 1941, 60.

<sup>3</sup> *Ephemeris Archaeologica* (Athens, 1899), p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> 'Les Monuments mégalithiques de Palestine', *Institut de Paléontologie humaine, Memoire 15* (Paris, 1935).

<sup>5</sup> *Præhistorische Zeitschrift*, VIII (Berlin, 1916), 33.

<sup>6</sup> 'The Rodmarton and Avening Portals', *Proc. Preh. Soc.*, VI, 1940, 156.

<sup>7</sup> Leisner in *Marburger Studien*, I, 1935, 148ff.

<sup>8</sup> Childe, *Prehistoric Communities of the British Isles* (Edinburgh, 1947), 51; Daniel, *Proc. Preh. Soc.*, VI, 153-155.



in corbelled tombs, orthostatic passage graves and cists; in the British Isles in tombs of the Cotswold-Severn, Clyde-Carlingford, Boyne and other types. But in France and southern Sweden port-holes seem confined to cists of the Paris type already discussed, and a few cists with port-holes in Central Germany are somewhat reminiscent in plan, but no longer in furniture, of the same type. Eastward we have dog-kennel port-holes carved in the portal stelae of Sardinian Giants' Graves, a port-hole in the side of a long cist in Apulia<sup>1</sup> and blocking the entrance to a typical Siculan I rock-cut tomb at Monte Salia, Sicily.<sup>2</sup> Incidentally the device was used in the megalithic temples of Malta.

Just because the port-hole is not confined to any one narrow class of megalithic tomb,<sup>3</sup> it seems to me a highly specialized trait suitable for defining a generalized 'megalithic' culture if any such exist. Now this distinctive device does turn up at least once in North Africa in the entrance to the corbelled rectangular tombs at Hamman el Sukra, Numidia.<sup>4</sup> Then there are examples in Palestine in the Jordan valley<sup>5</sup> and beyond it in Golan and Belka<sup>6</sup> and still further north even in Syria.<sup>7</sup> The little known megalithic tombs of eastern Bulgaria<sup>8</sup> use it and so of course do the more famous monuments of the Caucasian slopes.<sup>9</sup> In the two most celebrated monuments at Novosvobodnaya on the Belaya in the Kuban basin, the port-hole slabs do not close an entrance—there is none—but divide the chamber into two compartments, and the tombs themselves were not collective sepulchres but royal tombs in which the owner was buried with wife or slave. But generally in the Caucasus the port-hole appears in the outside wall of a modest cist-like tomb, normally only some 2.5 m. long. And then in Transcaucasia, in Abkhazia and right across the peninsula to the Araxes valley on the Persian frontier, there are stone slab tombs containing many skeletons and occasionally provided with port-hole slabs, as at Djönü.<sup>10</sup>

We cannot now stop there. Right across the ranges at Sialk<sup>11</sup> on the edge of the desert basin of Iran, two tombs in necropolis B comprise undeniable port-hole slabs. But the tombs of Sialk B can hardly be called megalithic; none measures more than 2 by 1.25 m., the side-slabs do not support a capstone but lean together, and the port-hole itself has dwindled to a symbolic aperture, in one case only 10 cm. in diameter. Nor are the Sialk B graves collective; each contains a single individual, sometimes accompanied by one or two wives. Yet Sialk B might be used to link with the west, with the Caucasus or Palestine, the celebrated Indian dolmens; for these too may at least be entered through port-hole slabs. But they are concentrated in the south of the Peninsula in areas not likely to be affected by land-borne impulses from Iran, but exposed rather to maritime influences. If their distribution do suggest inspiration from the West, that must surely have come by sea. Yet the ring of megalithic orthostats that often encircles Indian dolmens does recur in north-western Iran or in Transcaucasia. On the other hand, circles of great stones surround the dolmens of Palestine and North Africa and many of the megalithic tombs of

<sup>1</sup> Gervasio, *I Dolmen* (Bari, 1913), 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Bollettino di Paleontologia Italiana* (Parma, XLIII), 17.

<sup>3</sup> For this reason on the contrary, Daniel (*Proc. of the Prehistoric Society*, VI, 1940, 156) argues for several independent inventions of port-holes.

<sup>4</sup> *Praehist. Zeitschrift*, VIII, 53, Abb. 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Reallexikon der Vorgeschichte*, VIII, 112; *Antiquity*, VII (1933), 472.

<sup>6</sup> *Reallexikon*, VIII, 108.

<sup>7</sup> Déchelette, *Manuel d'archéologie préhistorique*, i.

<sup>8</sup> *Antiquity*, XII, 1938, 486.

<sup>9</sup> *Eurasia Septentrionalis Antiqua* (Helsinki), IX, 5ff.

<sup>10</sup> J. de Morgan, *Mission en Perse*, p. 48, fig. 48.

<sup>11</sup> Ghirshman, *Fouilles de Sialk*, II (Paris, 1939), 27.



western and northern Europe. There, as also in North Africa and probably in Palestine, the stone circle served as a support to sustain the cairn of stones or earthen tumulus that certainly once covered all occidental dolmens. Still between the easternmost of the latter and the Indian Peninsula there remains a vast space, not wholly covered with water but unspotted on any dolmen map available.

There seems also a chronological gap. The excavated dolmens of the Indian Peninsula have yielded implements of iron or at least wheel-made vases appropriate to the Iron Age. Most dolmens in north-western Europe are assigned to the Stone Age; not even those of Cis-Caucasia nor Palestine contain wheel-made pottery. Indeed in northern and western Europe there exist fairly adequate grounds for believing that some at least of all major types of local megalithic tomb were erected about or even a bit before 2000 B.C. The same is true of the rock-cut tombs (but not the Giants' Graves) of Sardinia and those of Sicily. The Early Cycladic, Early Minoan and Early Cypriote tombs I have so far mentioned undoubtedly belong to the third millennium B.C. and so do such Syrian rock-cut tombs as those in the 'Copper Age' cemetery of Byblos.<sup>1</sup> Even in the Caucasus, Novosvodobnaya<sup>2</sup> can hardly be put after 1500 B.C. and may well be nearer 2000. Within these chronological limits it might be legitimate to add a very significant phrase to the desired definition of a megalithic culture. All the tombs in question with a few exceptions seem to have been used as collective sepulchres, all at any rate contain a number of corpses which, whenever evidence be available, had not all been interred simultaneously, but successively over a longer or shorter period. (India provides exceptions to the latter part of this rule.) In some cases where the tombs are isolated or constitute groups of only three or four and contain 50 or more bodies, their use might have been permitted to a group larger than the natural family, to a clan. Where the tombs cluster in cemeteries as in Attica, Sicily, or Almeria they may have been just family vaults such as are so common in historical times down to the present day.

Now if we were prepared to accept collective burial as a distinctive trait of the—or an—original 'dolmen complex', we should be able to exclude from its *origins* the Egyptian mastabas and the rock-cut tombs beneath them.<sup>3</sup> Admittedly the plans of individual Egyptian tombs both under the Old Kingdom and later do agree in a startling way with those of individual 'megalithic' tombs both in Western Europe and in Mycenaean Greece.<sup>4</sup> Admittedly, too, huge stone slabs, but beautifully dressed, were used in building the funerary chambers of some Early Dynastic tombs and for the mastabas and pyramids that surmounted the burial vaults in the Old Kingdom. But every Egyptian tomb was excavated or erected to be the mortuary residence of an individual pharaoh or noble; not even members of his family were buried therein, but separate tombs constructed for their repose.

Moreover if we accepted the *mastaba* plus rock-cut tomb as the archetype of the 'dolmen', we should surely have to include in the dolmen family the wooden mortuary houses under the barrows of chieftains of the pastoral tribes of Eurasia, from the little

<sup>1</sup> Dunand, *Fouilles de Byblos* (Paris, 1939), pp. 430ff.

<sup>2</sup> The two 'dolmens' here are usually assigned to the Early Kuban phase, i.e. to the beginning of the Copper Age, but Degen-Kovalevskii argued in 1939 that they should be transferred to the end of that 'Age' and he may be right, cf. Childe, *Dawn*, pp. 149–158.

<sup>3</sup> As argued by Elliot Smith in a series of works beginning with 'The Evolution of the Dolmen and Rock-cut Tomb' in *Essays and Studies presented to Sir William Ridgeway* (Cambridge, 1913).

<sup>4</sup> As shown by Persson, 'New Tombs at Dendra', *Skrifter k. humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Lund*, XXXIV, 1942, 169.



round or square huts of the Stone Age<sup>1</sup> to the spacious wooden halls built by the Scythians and later peoples. So treated the dolmen family would have outgrown the specific limits imposed upon any classification that is to be scientifically useful.<sup>2</sup> If Egyptian royal tombs are to be included at all, they must be admitted as collaterals or descendants of the original dolmen. On the other hand, we have already included among its lineal descendants rock-cut family vaults of the second millennium B.C. and later. Now in Greece during the fifteenth and subsequent centuries B.C. only the commoners of the Mycenaean civilization were buried in such tombs; their kings were interred each in a stately tholos wherein might repose also his wife and perhaps unmarried children, but certainly no remoter descendants. So too at Antequera in the Guadelquivir basin three enormous tombs—Romeral, Menga and Viera—built each in a different technique and plan, of superb masonry, look like Royal Tombs contrasted with the simpler rock-cut tombs of the adjacent cemetery.<sup>3</sup> Even further north the great tholoi on the Boyne in Eire and Maes Howe in Orkney look suspiciously like Royal Tombs. Yet it would be absurd to exclude New Grange in Eire, Romeral in Spain and Atreus at Mycenae from the class of megalithic tombs even though they be not also collective. Presumably these imposing structures are the versions produced by societies given to the practice of collective burial, when divine kings have arisen in and from them. The same hypothesis must be invoked when we include a whole series of Etruscan, Thracian and Scythian tombs of the first millennium; these are so like the earlier Mycenaean or Hispanic tholoi that it would be illogical to exclude the one and not the other. The same remarks apply to the celebrated rock-cut tombs of eastern Anatolia and Iran<sup>4</sup> down to that of Darius himself at Naqsh-e-Rustam.

On the foregoing assumption of a connection between dolmen and rock-cut tomb it would seem likely that the complex originated around the eastern Mediterranean, presuming it had a single origin at all. For there the habit of excavating family sepulchres in the rock was undoubtedly very ancient and was maintained most consistently for millennia. In Europe the diffusion of the complex must have been effected by sea-ways, whether the human agents in the process were conquerors, merchant colonists, missionaries or searchers after Isles of the Blest or perchance hapless mariners whose small craft had been blown by the winds' caprice far beyond their intended goal. In any case the early centres of megalithic architecture in Europe all lie near the coasts of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the North Sea. Even the dolmens of the Crimea and Cis-Caucasia and the correlative rock-cut tombs or 'Catacombs' of the Pontic steppes are reasonably near the Euxine. And by sea the dolmen and the port-hole slab should have reached the Indian Peninsula too. But the starting point of the navigators is unknown; the distribution of the known Asiatic dolmens is by no means coastal. In Palestine most are concentrated along and east of the Jordan valley. Seaways can have had no part in diffusing dolmens in Iran.

I have no space, nor much desire, to do more than mention the second class of megalithic monuments to which I referred at the start—cromlechs or stone circles. Some—in Britain, Tunis, Palestine, Iran and India—are just the kerbs supporting tumuli that once covered the graves they still surround. The tombs thus surrounded were not always megalithic or

<sup>1</sup> In South Russia, Germany, Switzerland, Holland and England, see Rykov, 'Pogrebennye v shalashakh' *Izvestia GAIMK*, Moskva, 1934, 100; *Offa*, Kiel, I, 1936, 77-82; Van Giffen, 'Die Baurat der Einzelgraber' *Mannus Bibliothek*, 44 (Leipzig, 1930); *Proc. Preh. Soc.*, IX, 1943, 24-5.

<sup>2</sup> Yet the dolmens of Novosvodobnaya do look very like petrified versions of the wooden chambers under other Early Kuban barrows.

<sup>3</sup> S. Gimenez Reina, *op. cit.*, 49-52; this cemetery is some 15 km. from Romeral, but some of its tombs reproduce exactly the latter's plan.

<sup>4</sup> Described best in Herzfeld, *Iran in the Ancient East*.



collective. In northern Europe they were normally separate graves. Van Giffen's work in Holland has shown that the stones may replace or be replaced by wooden posts. Indeed in the case of sepulchral circles I suggest that neither the *lithoi* nor their *megathos* are the decisive element; the circle is the crucial thing, its materials being dictated by geology, its magnitude by the importance of the dead encircled or by the intensity of the survivors' fear of ghosts.

But no Briton could deny the existence of non-sepulchral circles, knowing of Avebury, Stonehenge and Boodgar. All I need do is to remind you that there were megalylic as well as megalithic circles. The trilithon circle at Stonehenge is obviously a translation of a wooden one. Such translation might occur at any time and almost anywhere. India is a classic land for the translation of wood into stone. Piggott<sup>1</sup> has recently reminded us of the striking instance at Sānchi, both circular and funerary, but not megalithic. The quest for any one megalithic circle-culture is much less promising than that for a megalithic tomb-complex.

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Earliest Buddhist Shrines', *Antiquity*, XVII, 1943, 1-6.



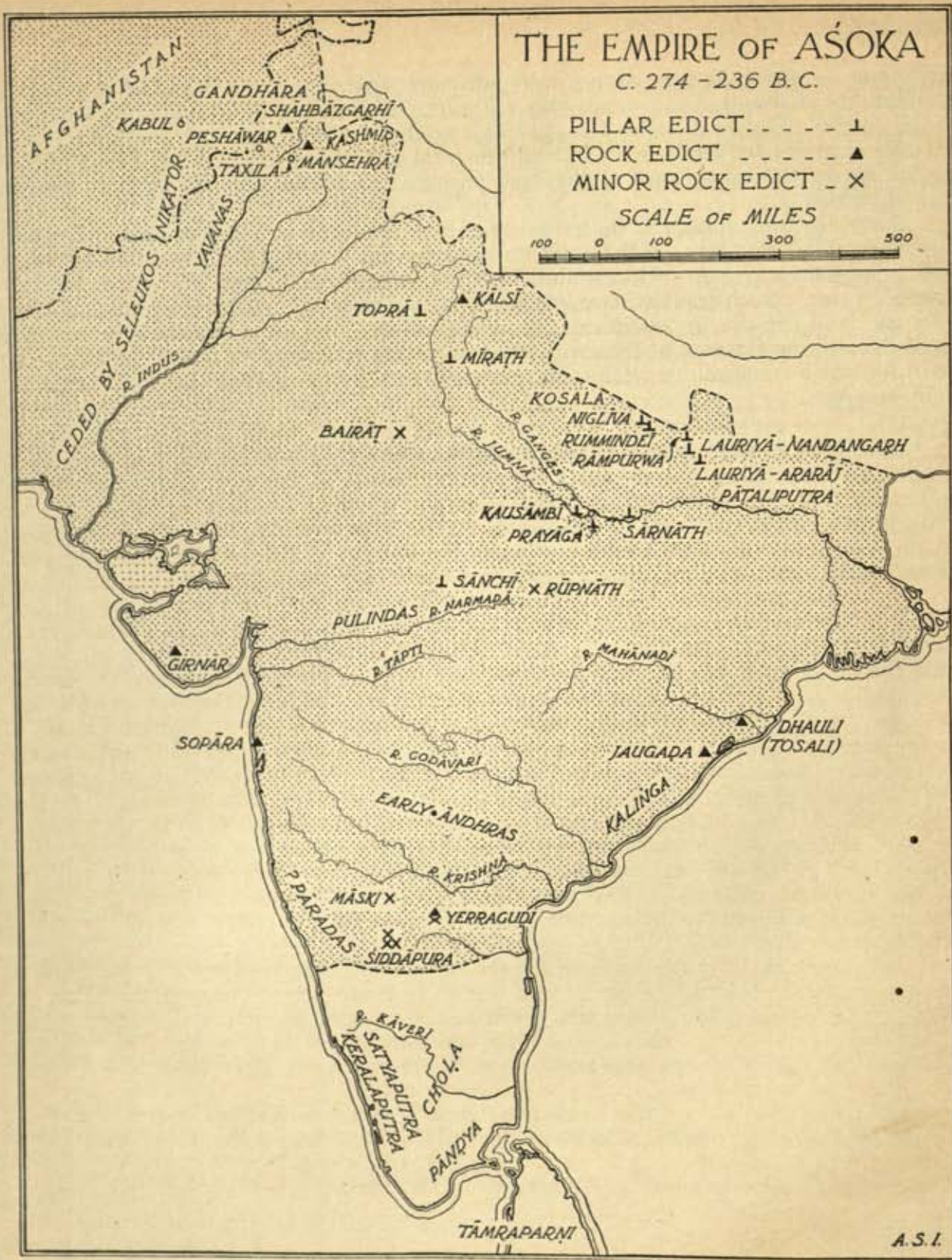


FIG. 1